



Joy of adoption

Several adoptions finalized locally and across the state in open court to help children find stable homes

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**By Steven Hepker
Staff Writer**

It wasn't some grisly murder or deep constitutional matter that drew the state Court of Appeals chief judge to a Jackson County bench Tuesday.

"Most people don't like to come to court. They associate it with bad things," Judge William Whitbeck said. "Adoptions are uniformly a good thing."

The smiles, hugs and tears of joy stemming from adoption ceremonies are usually hidden away in closed courts, but courtroom doors were thrown open Tuesday for the inaugural Michigan Adoption Day.

Supreme Court and Court of Appeals judges fanned out across Michigan to promote adoption as vital to thousands of children needing stable homes.

Whitbeck sat on the bench with family court Judge Susan Vandercook in the afternoon as she presided over several adoptions. Judge John McBain participated in Adoption Day ceremonies in the morning.

Vandercook, wearing her adoption robe decked with zoo animals, first finalized the adoptions of brothers Nathan Allan and Richard Leo into the Haislip family of Jackson.

James III and Yvonne Haislip took in Nathan, 3, at 6 months, and Richie, 18 months, came to them as a newborn. Their mother, a cousin, lost the children to Family Independence Agency for abuse and neglect.

"Everybody think this is a good idea?" Vandercook asked.

"Yes!" the family responded.

With that, Vandercook declared them legally Haislips, and their birth records will

be changed to show Yvonne and James as their parents.

"I have always thought of them as my brothers," said Alicia Haislip, 20, holding Richie at a punch and cake reception after the ceremony. The boys also join James IV, 18, and Michelle, 24.

"We are just glad they were able to stay in the family," said James Haislip III. The biological parents and grandparents, he said, will be encouraged to see the children.

At the other end of the spectrum was Alesha, a 20-year-old Jackson woman due to give birth to a girl in January. Adult adoptions are rare, but this one was long overdue for Donald and Susan Collins.

"I have raised Alesha for the past 13 years and we were married Oct. 17," Donald Collins said of his stepdaughter. "This helps us to be a complete family."

"It is appropriate this is two days before Thanksgiving," Whitbeck remarked.

The Collinses said this will be a special Thanksgiving as they look ahead to their first grandchild.

"Because she is going to have my grandchild, I wanted my house in order," Donald Collins said.

Other adoptive parents and children, and FIA staff, came to celebrate adoption.

Diane Clay is a single parent who was a foster mom turned mom. She adopted five children in the past seven years. Two are 5 years old and the others are 12, 10 and 9.

"They were in foster care, and I just couldn't let them go," she said. "It has been rewarding. I would do it over again. In fact, this has inspired me to go to college."

She offered some advice to potential adoptive parents: "You can do it."

Whitbeck said 12,701 children were temporary wards of the state as of Sept. 30, and 19,000 were in foster care. Of 4,600 eligible for adoption in Michigan, 400 are not targeted for adoption, he said. Many thousands more children await adoption in foreign countries.

He and Vandercook urge potential parents to call the Family Independence Agency.

Sheela Eva, 11, a fourth-grader at Northwest Elementary School, was one of them. She spent years in an Indian orphanage the size of Grass Lake.

Sherry Eva adopted Sheela while she was single in 2000. Her new husband,

Gary Eva, also wants to adopt Sheela, but Vandercook said they must be married at least one year before that will happen.

Like children adopted from China, Sheela came from poverty to the land of plenty.

"She is just so appreciative of everything," her mother said. "It is amazing how many things we take for granted."

Dawnn, an 11-year-old Jackson girl, wiped her eyes Tuesday as she read a prepared statement titled "My adoption story." She entered foster care at 5 when her young mother was unable to care for her properly. She now has nine brothers and sisters and loves her new family.

"I think God placed me exactly where he wanted me to be," she said. "For me, adoption is like knowing I belong."

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